

How To Train Your Dog

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Summary: A retelling of How To Train Your Dragon with dog species replacing the dragon species. A young Viking teenager befriends a dog in secret against his village's wishes.

1. This Is Berk

**How To Train Your Dog**

This Is Berk

This is Berk.

It's twelve days north of hopeless and a few degrees south of freezing to death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery. It's a village in the middle of the mountains here, where the goats and sheep roam almost free and the fog gathers over the ground every evening. The village is big, with a population of pretty much over a thousand people. It's nighttime, when the lights are out and the moon is round. It's peaceful. Kind of nice. I'm asleep, too, dreaming of nice things like warmth and peace and anywhere but this place.

My village. In a word? Sturdy. It's been here for seven generations but every single building is new. You can tell. The stables, the blacksmith's where I work, and every single one of the houses has got brand new tiles and walls and shingles on the roofs. I wake up. I don't really know what's woken me up at first, but then I hear it. The rustling of leaves. The alarmed bleating of the sheep and goats. And the distant, rhythmic pounding of countless paws.

We have fishing, hunting, and a charming view of the sunsets . . .

. . . the only problems are the pests.

I jump up and get dressed hurriedly, heart pounding, eyes wide.

They're here.

Y'see, most places have mice, or mosquitos . . .

I race down the stairs.

. . . we have . . .

I open the door to see fleeing livestock and people in the night, shouting alarms and carrying torches and running away from _something._ Then I see it. A dark, hulking shape, bounding after them. I see a gleam of dripping white fangs, bared in the sinking moonlight. I slam the door shut before it can see me and demolish my house.

. . . wild dogs.

The scene outside is one of complete lunacy. People running, torches waving, weapons flashing, animals screaming in terror as giant beasts rip them apart. Chaos, right? Most people would leave. Not us. We're Vikings. We have stubbornness issues.

I dash out the door, making sure it's closed tight, and charge down the steps. It's freezing, but the blood and adrenaline surging through my veins fights it off. Snarls and barks fill the air, along with the clanging of weapons and yells of the warriors fighting them off. The fight all around me is as terrifying as it is exhilarating. Any second, a dog could target me, run me down, and tear my throat out. But there's something about a battle that makes you feel alive. It's a sickening, horrid form of feeling alive, too.

My name's Hiccup.

Great name, I know. But, it's not the worst. Parents believe a hideous name will frighten off gnomes and trolls.

A bulldog hounding a group of warriors barrels by, and Hoark, a friend of the chief's, almost lands on top of me. He roars in my face, yells a grim, "Mornin'!" and takes off again.

Like our charming Viking demeanor wouldn't do that.

I run as fast as I can â€" which isn't very fast, actually â€" up the wood walkway that winds up the mountain. As I pass, adults that know me well (too well) do a double take at the sight of me, too busy fending off the dogs and saving what livestock they can to stop. They yell at me. "What're you doin' here?" and "Get inside!" and "Hiccup, get back inside!" meet my ears. I ignore it. They do it all the time anyway.

I run into one of the streets, and see too late that a dog â€" I can't really see what breed â€" is lumbering towards me. Before I can move, though, a huge hand grabs the back of my shirt and drags me out of the way with an angry _"Hiccup!"_

Before I have time to be even a little grateful, I hear the voice I've been dreading ask someone passing by: "What is _he_ doin' out agai- _What're you doin' out?_" I don't think he realizes he's completely holding me off the ground. He shoves me toward the wooden walkway, making me stumble, yelling, "Get inside!"

That's Stoick the Vast, chief of the tribe. He's true to his name; very vast, with a thick knotted beard of fiery red hair, arms as thick as tree trunks, and green eyes that seem to stare into your soul and mock you for not being him, the perfect Viking. They say when he was a baby he popped a dog's head clean off of its shoulders. He picks up a wooden lawn chair and, with an angry grunt, hurls it at a passing dog. It shatters against its hide, followed by a pained yelp.

Do I believe it?

Yes I do.

He turns to one of his men and says calmly, "What've we got?"

"Bulldogs, poodles, greyhounds, oh, and Hoark saw a golden retriever!" the man answers, much more frantic than the chief.

Stoick lowers his voice, as though to avoid calling phantoms forth by just their name. "Any of those kind?"_ he asks.

"None so far."

A piece of flaming shrapnel, probably alit by a torch or something, lands on his shoulder plate. He brushes it off with his bare hand, muttering, "Good."

I've been watching him the whole time. I can't help but look in awe at his casualness and . . . well, Viking-ness. But now I've gotta run. I see some dogs and warriors headed my way, and man, I do not want to be caught in the crossfire.

I run past barrels full of fire, wire fences, and rope tripwires, all used to trap or, hopefully, kill dogs. The dogs are unfazed by fire, and they smash right through anything we throw at them. They ignore the weapons and shield piercing and banging against their hides. They're tough. We have to be tougher.

I slow down as I approach a low-ceilinged building. The walls are open to customers and visitors, though understandably we have none right now. Weapons like swords, spears, axes, hammers, maces, and bows are strung about the benches and floor and hang on the walls in neat lines. A balding man hunches over his work at the anvil, sweating despite the nighttime cold. He's missing an arm and a leg and all sorts of things replace them at any given time. Right now, a heavy hammer is screwed into the end of the arm stump. He looks up, sees me, and calls jokingly, "Oh, nice of you to join the party! I thought you'd been carried off."

I fasten my blacksmithing apron on as I reply, "No, me? Nah, come on, I'm waaay-"_ I say this as I struggle to put a hammer head on its peg. Oh, irony. "-too muscular for their tastes. They wouldn't know what to do with all . . . this_" I flex my nonexistent biceps.

He grins, unfastening his hammer and replacing it with a hook. "Well, they need toothpicks, don't they?"

The meathead with attitude and interchangeable hands is Gobber. I've

been his apprentice every since I was little.

Well . . . littler.

I exchange some weapons for some Vikings at the window. Outside, I can hear Stoick yelling, "We'll move to the lower defenses! We'll counterattack with the catapults!" at his men. Then I hear pounding feet on wood, and a crash as a dog smashes through a building. They do that a lot. See? Old village, lots and lots of new buildings.

"_Fire!" _someone shouts. One of the houses must be alight.

I glance outside as I hear a girl's voice yell, "All right, let's go!" I see five figures run past with a water barrel and watch them hungrily. Oh, and that's Fishlegs (a chubby know-it-all), Snotlout (my ass of a cousin), the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut (brother and sister that hate each other), and . . .

The last figure empties a bucket of water on the burning house and turns away just as it explodes " there must've been something explode-able in there or something. The fire erupts behind her, bathing her in orange-yellow glow.

. . . _Astrid._

Wow, I mean . . . just _wow._ You can't really get any prettier than Astrid. She's . . . perfect. And she looks a lot better with the fire behind her and walking like she's completely in control. Plus, she's surrounded by four grimacing mud-streaked teens that could really use a bath.

They run past my window again, in the opposite direction this time. Oh, their job is so much cooler. They get to actually be _out_ there, while I'm-

A set of tongs latches onto the back of my shirt and carries me away from the window, back to the interior of the shop. "Oh, come on, let me out, please. I need to make my mark!"

Gobber sets me down and gives me a prod with his tong-hand . . . thing. "Oh, you've made _plenty_ of marks. All in the wrong places!"

"Please, two minutes. I'll kill a dog, my life will get _infinitely_ _better- I might even get a date!" I know it's pointless to argue because we've been having this argument a lot, but I can't help it. What was so wrong with _one chance?_

He gives me this look, like he thinks I'm crazy. "You can't lift a hammer, you can't swing an axe- you can't even throw one of these!" He holds up a rope with iron attached to the ends. Outside, someone snatches it out of his hand and hurls it at a passing bulldog. It tangles its legs up and it crashes to the ground, snarling.

"Okay, fine, but _this-_" I back up and pat my _amazingly awesome_ _invention in the back of the shop, "-will throw it for me-"

With a rusty squeal, the machine springs to life and tosses a bola at Gobber. He leans out of the way and it hits a customer in the head.

The guy teeters over backwards, eyes crossed. Oops.

Gobber turns and advances on me. "See? Now this right here is what I'm talking about!"

I start mumbling. I stutter sometimes. "-mild calibration issues-"

"No, _Hiccup,"_ he says firmly, cutting me off. "If you ever want to get out there, fight dogs, you need to stop all . . . this." He gestures to me.

"You just gestured to _all_ of me!" I say indignantly.

His eyes light up, like I've just said something brilliant. "Yes, that's it! Stop being all of you!"

I narrow my eyes at him and start nodding knowingly. _"Oh-_"_

He imitates me. Like always. "Ooooh, yeah!"

I'm weird like this. Whenever someone insults me and I can't fight back, the snarky just comes out of nowhere. "You- you sir are playing a dangerous game- keeping this much _raw Viking-ness_ contained- there will be consequences!" I proclaim, waving my finger in his face.

"I'll take my chances," he deadpans dryly. "Sword. Sharpened. _Now._" He turns and tosses me a rusty, chipped broadsword. I just barely manage to catch it with both arms. I handle it carefully, even though not even a drunk and stupid Viking could cut himself on these dull edges.

One day I'll get out there. It's not like they can stop me every day. Hey, maybe it'll be today. I just need one lousy chance, that's all. Because killing a dog is _everything_ around here.

Even as I'm sharpening the sword and it makes all kinds of noise, I can still hear and see everything going on outside. I see a pack of poodles ransacking a sheep pen. Now, a poodle head is sure to get me at least noticed. Those tufts of hair on their heads and legs and back aren't just for show- they're actually tufts of razor-sharp quills that they can launch at will. They're incredibly balanced and almost graceful, like birds.

Further down I hear deep raspy snarling. Some bulldogs must be raiding the fish stores. Bulldogs are tough. Taking down one of those would _definitely_ get me a girlfriend. Their skin is like armor. Tough and very hard to pierce with anything. They have thick, short muzzles that will not let go once they've got a hold of you and short stubby legs. I watch as one pulls a fish pole right out of the ground.

I see a cloud of grey fog around some houses, and know what's there. Greyhounds? Exotic. Two heads, twice the status. Yes, two heads. Both are independent. They have very long necks, like snakes, that are incredibly flexible, and they use it to their advantage. They emit fog from their skin. They are definitely the weirdest dogs out there.

Movement catches my eye on the catapults. They're in charge of firing rocks and nets at the dogs on the ground. Stoick the Vast is up there with his second-in-commands. "They've found the sheep!" one shouts.

"Concentrate fire over the lower bank!" Stoick shouts back, and they turn the catapult about. They fire at something in the distance, and I watch as a vicious poodle turns into a bloody mess in the dirt.

Then, there's the golden retriever. Only the best Vikings go after those. They have this . . . nasty habit of knowing who's in command. And attacking them.

Oh, and climbing things.

I watch as one bursts through the wooden walkway winding up the catapult Stoick is on. He looks down at it disdainfully, muttering something, and then he casually hits the most vicious dog ever on the snout with his hammer. It growls and snaps at him- then suddenly dives off the platform and starts running.

In fact, all of the dogs are running, or crouching, or taking cover. My eyes widen in anticipation and I stick my head outside, looking everywhere. The men freeze, and start panicking.

And then we hear it.

The low, smooth growl; quiet, yet it rises above all other sound and is heard by all. It builds and grows louder into a wailing howl as the beast comes closer. Underneath it all is the sound of thudding paws, going at a speed no other dog can match.

The ultimate prize is the dog no one's ever seen.

The howling is deafening now.

We call it the-

"PIT BULL!"

"_GET DOWN!_"

And then with a boom, some_thing_ barrels through the base of the catapult, and wood goes flying like an explosion hit it. Quick as a shadow, it darts back into the darkness of the forest, and all anyone can see is a black blur.

"_JUMP!_" Stoick yells as the catapult begins to crumple into a mass of wood and metal.

This thing never steals food, never shows itself, and-

With another boom, the remains of the catapult explode as the dog smashes through it again. It disappears into the trees as the catapult disintegrates and falls apart.

-never misses.

I watch all this with wide eyes from my window. No one has ever

killed a pit bull. That's why I'm gonna be the first. Ambitious, I know. Why would I succeed where others have failed? Because I've got that bola launcher, and it'll catch that dog for me.

What makes a pit bull so dangerous, you ask? Well, besides the fact that no one has seen it, it's rumored to be the biggest, ugliest, meanest dog to have ever lived. They say one look at its nightmare face will kill you instantly. They say its red eyes paralyze you as it mauls you to death. Aside from rumors, it can smash through literally anything, and it's responsible for most of our buildings being gone. For other dogs, it takes a while to completely demolish a house. For the pit bull, all it takes is one hit. It's the fastest dog alive.

I walk back into the shop. Gobber's detaching his tongs and replacing them with a battle axe. "Man the fort, Hiccup," he says. "They need me out there."

He almost walks outside, then turns back to me with his finger pointed at me. "Stay. Put . . . there."

I try to look as innocent as possible.

"Y'know what I mean. HYAAAAAAH!" he yells, running out into the fray.

Right. Like I'm staying here.

A minute later I'm running my bola launcher through the village, dodging warriors and dead sheep and goats and the occasional dead dog. People wanting their weapons exchanged yell at me, but I just yell, "Be right back!" over my shoulder and keep going. I run by some poodles surrounding a group of sheep, but suddenly Stoick the Vast appears and hurls a net over them with an angry grunt. They try to chew through the net, but Stoick throws himself onto one of their gnashing jaws, clamping it shut and yelling, "Mind yourself! The devils still have some juice in 'em!" I make sure to swerve away from them so he won't see me. No doubt he'd try to stop me if he saw me.

All of the dogs are fighting the other warriors, so I run by relatively unnoticed. I run to a cliff at the edge of the village near the demolished catapult. I set up the bola launcher quickly . . . and I wait for my target.

I scan the woods for a moving shadow. It's dark and the trees are rustling, and I don't know what's a dog or what's the wind. The din is behind me, and it's relatively quiet here.

Which is why I can hear it.

Low snarls and growls creep from the woods, along with faint twigs snapping, and you can tell it's just one animal making them. They have a unique quality to them, a raspy shrieking sound that's different from all the other dogs. I've memorized the sounds of the different species because they raid us so often, and now I can tell the difference between a poodle's cries and a retriever's.

I spot something. The sun is rising and light filters through the trees. A shape runs through the darkness. The growl rises in pitch to

become a shrieking howl and I take aim with my launcher. The dog smashes through another catapult and dashes toward a cliff. It looks like it's leaving. All of the other dogs are starting to leave their opponents with their food and follow it.

I take aim at the bobbing shape at the front of the pack. For a second I catch a gleam of flashing eyes. Like they were looking my way.

I fire, and the recoil sends me flying. I land on my back, hard, but I scramble back up again to watch. A pained howl rips through the air, and the dog at the front of the pack lurches to the side. It teeters at the edge of the cliff-

-and tumbles right over the edge.

I race to the cliff " down a ways, so I don't run into any dogs - and look down just in time to see a shape rolling down to cliff and disappearing into the trees. It's so far away I can barely see it.

"Oh, I hit it."

Silence.

"YES I HIT IT!" I yell in triumph, jumping up and waving my arms around. "Did _anybody_ see that?"

I hear scrambling claws and tearing grass. I turn around and see a golden retriever climbing over the cliff edge and staring straight at me. It curls its lip and growls.

". . . Except for you."

Then the dog lunges.

I can't help screaming my lungs out as I run for my life, the dog hot at my heels. I can hear its panting breath, can feel its eyes boring into my back, wanting so badly to rip me apart. The men have long since gone to the main square so I'm completely devoid of help. I run behind a wooden pole and cringe as the dog smashes right into it. Wood splinters go flying, but the pole holds. Then silence.

I inch around the edge, hoping to see it lumbering away, but then I hear it behind me, opening its jaws. Before I can even look, though, someone streaks by and grabs its head.

I watch as Stoick the Vast sends it off with furious blows, and the retriever gallops off with an angry snarl.

Oh, and there's one more thing you need to know.

The other men have gathered. Everyone watches as the pole snaps in two and topples over, nearly crushing a man who's not paying attention. I can't help watching as part of it breaks off and rolls down to the lower village, cutting the net holding the poodles in the process. With food in their mouths " _our_ food " they dash off to the trees.

I wince, knowing that everyone is looking at me.

"Sorry . . . Dad."

****This is going to be really hard.****

****First of all, dogs can't fly or breathe fire, obviously, so I need to think of things for New Tail, Test Drive, Romantic Flight, stuff like that. I definitely want to finish this, and I already have ideas, so that's okay, I guess.****

****I had this idea ever since I saw the movie. The first thing that struck me was how much Toothless is like a pit bull.
Observe:****

****Intelligent and friendly****

****Thick shoulders and narrow hips****

****Shorter and wider snout than other
dogs/dragons****

****Fast****

****Everyone thinks they're the most dangerous of all
dogs/dragons****

****Misunderstood****

****This is my logic, behold.****

****Berk isn't an island village in the story. It's a mountain village, because the dogs obviously can't fly and can't navigate across the islands.****

****Poodles = Nadders****

****Bulldogs = Gronkles****

****Greyhounds = Zipplebacks****

****Golden retrievers = Monstrous Nightmares****

****Pit bulls = Night Furies****

****If it wasn't obvious, then I'll tell you about the dogs. They're not normal dogs. For one, they're as big as the dragons in the movie. The poodles have quills, the greyhounds have two heads on necks as long as a Zippleback's and can emit fog from their skin, and the golden retrievers can climb things like a cat. They all have bodies hard enough to smash through things like houses without damage.****

****R&R, if you wish, my dearies. I love feedback (who doesn't?) and I definitely need opinions on this.****

**** . . . As I write this, my pit bull is on my lap. She keeps squirming around so I can barely type. OH, IRONY.****

****Pia, stop squirming. I'm trying to write, god damn it.****

2. The Downed Dog

****In which we meet Toothless! Oh, my ears. . . .****

****The Downed Dog****

Silence.

With a nervous glance at my father, I mumble quickly, "Okay, but I hit a pit bull." Right before he grabs me by the scruff and starts dragging me toward the house. I'm painfully aware of the entire village watching, some amused, some laughing, but all disdainful.

"D'ooooh- _it's not like the last few times, Dad, I mean I really actually hit it!" I say in protest, trying to get him to look at me, to notice me. He stares straight ahead, frustration and anger etched on every line on his face. Refusing to look at me. "You guys were busy and I had a _very_ clear shot- it went down just off Raven Point, let's get a search party out there before it-"

Then my dad drops me, whirls around, and yells, "_STOP!_ Just . . . _stop!_" I shrink back a little at the pent-up irritation in his voice. I glance around at the crowd, half-hoping someone will distract him or something. But he continues, "Every time you step outside, _disaster_ falls. Can yeh not see I have bigger problems? Winter is almost here and I have an _entire_ village to feed!"

I say before I can stop myself, "Eh, between you and me the village could do with a little less feeding, don't you think?" Some warriors behind me pat their ample bellies with self-conscious expressions on their faces.

"This isn't a _joke,_ Hiccup!" Dad snaps exasperatedly. He huffs out a breath. "Why can't you follow the simplest orders?" he demands.

The only thing I can think of is, "I- I can't stop myself! I see a dog and I have to just . . . _kill it,_ y'know?" I make a (hopefully) violent gesture, like I'm effortlessly snapping a dog's neck. Preferably a pit bull's. I try to sound casual about the whole thing, like I do this every day. "It's . . . who I am, Dad."

Sure.

Dad can't even seem to think of anything to say. He rubs his forehead like he's trying to fend off a vicious headache. For a second, he looks tired, and it makes me sad. I don't _want_ to mess up so much and cause him trouble. Honestly, I just want him to look at me once â€" just once â€" with pride, like he wants to announce to everyone that I am his son, and he is my father.

"Oh, you're . . . many things, Hiccup. But a dog killer is not one of them," he says softly. "Get back to the house."

Pride. Yeah, right. I wonder what it feels like. I wonder if I ever will feel it.

Dad looks up at Gobber. "Make sure he gets there. I have his mess to

clean up." And then he strides away, his warriors following him, casting disapproving looks in my direction. Gobber gives me a smack on the back of the head, and I can almost hear him saying, "I told you so."

With nothing else left to do, I walk back home, my head hanging. A raspy cackle announces the passing of the resident peanut gallery: Snotlout, Fishlegs, Tuffnut and Ruffnut, and Astrid. "Quite the performance," Tuffnut the twin shoots at me, a half-smirk on his crude face. I ignore him.

"I've never seen anyone mess up that badly," the smart-ass voice of my cousin Snotlout joins in. "That _helped!_"

"Thank you, thank you, I was trying," I mutter, hoping it'll satisfy the idiots for today and make them shut up. I hear Snotlout yell, and I'm pretty sure Gobber has just knocked him over. Astrid and Fishlegs don't say anything, but I can feel their eyes on me. There goes Hiccup the Useless, they always say. Off to mess something else up.

And the worst part is that _everyone_ thinks that. Even Gobber. Even _Dad._ Isn't he supposed to, you know, hate that kind of stuff?

"I _really did_ hit one," I tell Gobber halfheartedly as we walk up the hill to my house. No one's around anymore.

"Sure."

"He_ never listens._"

"Oh, it runs in the family."

"And when he does it's always with this . . . disappointed scowl, like someone skimped on the meat on his sandwich." I stop on the step, turn to Gobber, and start talking in my dad's heavy accent. _"Excuse me, barmaid, I'm afraid yeh brought me the wrong offspring! I ordered an extra large boy with beefy arms, extra guts and glory on the side! This here, this is a talking fishbone!"_ I've gotta say, it's one spot-on interpretation.

Gobber smiles. It's that stupid kind of smile where the speaker is about to depart some great wisdom upon lesser mortals. "Now, yer thinkin' about this all wrong. It's not so much what yeh look like, it's what's _inside_ that he can't stand!"

. . . If he thought that was supposed to help, then I would hate to see him try to hurt someone. "Thank you for summing that up," I deadpan, turning to open my door and just shut everyone out.

"Look, the point is," he says, making me pause, "stop trying so hard to be something you're _not._"

"I just wanna be one of you guys!" I say, and damn it, my voice cracks. I hurry inside and shut the door before he can try to comfort me. He would only just make it worse.

I stand in the doorway in the dawn's half-darkness, and suddenly I just feel so tired. I want to stumble upstairs and crawl under my blankets and go to sleep all day. I always try to sleep the insults

and the disapproval away, and wake up feeling much better. Not even the prospect of a downed pit bull can tear me away from my sleep.

But then I pause. I just shot down a _pit bull._ The most feared dog of all time. The dog no one has ever seen. It was somewhere out there in the woods, waiting for me, trussed up like a Snoggletog turkey. How could I pass this up?

No one believed me when I said I'd shot it down. Not even my own father. What better way to make them believe than to go find it myself?

The decision is made in my mind before I know it. I grab my sketchbook, my pencil, and a hunting knife that hangs over the stove, a thick, sharp thing that shines in the light. It almost scares me, but then I remember what's at stake; my future, my status. My pride.

Clutching my sketchbook in one hand and the knife in the other, I dash out the back door, look around and make sure no one can see me, then run to the trees.

v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v

Back at Berk, in the Mead Hall, Stoick the Vast and his warriors crowd around the huge main table. A fire crackles in the hole in the middle. Anxious murmurs filter through the mass of people as Stoick proclaims for all to hear, "Either we finish them or they'll finish us! It's the only way we'll be rid of them!"

He stoops over a long map at the head of the table. It depicts the village, the surrounding forest, and the mountain range they live in. "If we find the den and destroy it, the dogs will leave," Stoick continues. He snatches up a knife and stabs the map in a foggy corner with numerous dog shapes dotted here and there, all gnashing teeth and bulging eyes. "They'll find another home. One more search, before the snow rolls in." His eyes sweep the room.

"Those horses never come back," someone across the table protests.

"We're _Vikings,"_ Stoick says, waving his hand. "It's an occupational hazard! Now who's with me?" He narrows his eyes at those who seem afraid.

Numerous excuses and denials fill the air. "Count me out," one man grumbles. "Today's no good for me. I have to do my axe returns," another mutters.

"All right," Stoick says lowly. "Those who stay . . . will look after Hiccup."

Immediately hands shoot up from every person in the room, along with now-enthusiastic yells.

"Aye, that's more like it."

As the warriors file out of the Mead Hall, Gobber finishes off his drink at a bench and says gruffly, "Right. I'll pack my

undies."

Stoick strides over to him, giving him a knowing look. "No, I need you to stay and train some new recruits."

Gobber leans back. "Oh, perfect, yeah, and while I'm busy, Hiccup can cover the store! Molten steel, razor sharp blades, lots of time to himself . . . what could possibly go wrong?"

Stoick sits down heavily with a sigh. "What am I going to do with him, Gobber?"

"Put him in training with the others."

"No, I'm serious!"

"So am I!"

Stoick widens his eyes, and Gobber can see the instinctive concern for his son behind them. "He'd be killed before you let the first dog out of its cage!"

"Oh, you don't know that," Gobber says with a wave of his hand.

"I do know that."

"No yeh don't."

"No, actually, I do."

Gobber turns on him exasperatedly. "No, yeh don't!"

"Listen," Stoick says softly, standing up, "you know what he's like. By the time he could crawl he's been . . . different. He doesn't listen, he has the attention span of a sparrow-

Meanwhile, Gobber has lost his jutting fake tooth in his drink.

"-I take him fishing and he goes hunting for- for trolls!"

Gobber suddenly whirls on him. "Trolls exist! They steal your socks. . . . But only the left ones. What's with that?"

Stoick ignores him and starts pacing. "When I was a boy-

"Oh, here we go," Gobber mutters.

"-my father told me to bang my head against a rock and I did it! I thought it was crazy, but I didn't question him- and you know what happened?" he asks Gobber, who really isn't paying attention at all.

"Yeh got a headache," Gobber guesses, placing his fake tooth back in his mouth.

"That rock split in two. It taught me what a Viking could do, Gobber, he could- he could crush mountains, level forests, tame seas!" Stoick's eyes are alight, and his voice speaks with an animated fervor. But then he collapses back onto the bench. "Even as a boy I knew what I was, what I had to become. . . . Hiccup is not that

boy." He glances sideways at Gobber, and his expression is obvious. He would never show such a face in public for all to see, instead letting it out when only his best and closest friend was with him. It was the expression of a man who truly doesn't know what to do anymore. He wants Hiccup to grow up and become a Viking, but he's scared. Scared for his small son, when he could be so easily crushed by their unforgiving culture.

Gobber pauses before replying. "Yeh can't stop 'im, Stoick," he starts carefully. "You can only prepare him. I know it seems hopeless, but the truth is you won't always be around to protect 'im. He's going to get out there again- he's probably out there now!"

Stoick looks away, deep in thought. Though they were the words he doesn't want to hear, he knows they're true. And as chief of the tribe and Hiccup's father, he needs to make a decision.

v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v^v

It's been five hours. Five hours. And still I haven't found that stupid dog.

My feet are aching and sore from walking through hills and valleys and over fallen logs and bubbling streams. My head is buzzing from the constant view of leaves, tree trunks, and flitting birds here and there. My hair's all over the place by now, the humid (though chilly) air wreaking havoc on my red frizz. I'm tired, achy, hungry, and I haven't eaten all day, my feet hurt, my eyes hurt, I'm tired-

And I still haven't found that stupid dog.

Oh, come on. Pit bulls are supposed to be the biggest dogs out there. How hard could it be to find one? I glare down at my sketchbook and the map of the area I'd drawn. Bold black X's cover the page, places I've checked to see if the pit bull had landed there when I'd shot it down. I spot an area that I haven't checked yet and, noting its position, glance up at the sun to align myself. It's a trick Dad taught me during the phase where he'd tried to get me interested in manly stuff like hunting and fishing and camping. I never forgot it, and it was sure useful now.

I climb over a bluff and squeeze my eyes shut, hopeful, praying to the gods, let this be it. . . .

I open my eyes. And . . . nothing.

Fantastic.

I jot an X down on the page where I was, then, in a fit of sudden fury, I just scribble all over the drawing. It's all pointless anyway. The dog must have chewed through the ropes or something and escaped. My chance at glory, gone forever.

I sigh, closing my sketchbook and muttering to myself, "Oh, the gods hate me."

I plod down a little hill, kicking sticks and stones out of my path. "Some people lose their knife in the mud- no, not me! I managed

to lose an _entire dog-"_

A pine branch waves ahead of me, and I angrily swat it away. I shouldn't have, because it comes right back around and whips me in the face.

"_OW!"_

Some of the dead twigs scrape my eye and I clutch it, involuntary (manly!) tears boiling behind my lids. _Ow._ I should've seen that coming. I glare with one eye at the guilty tree, and what I see makes me pause.

It's ripped in half.

Dried bark and dead branches litter the ground around it, long since torn off the tree itself and scattered everywhere. And right under the tree is-

-a deep muddy trough in the dirt, dipping with the land and ending on a small bluff. Like some huge rock came barreling through here and flew right off the edge.

Or an animal, bound by ropes and out of control.

I scramble down the scrape in the earth's skin, almost losing my footing. The trough is three times as wide as me. I make my way over to the bluff, passing a bared root on the way. Scores of claw and teeth marks have hit it, like a frantic creature had clutched at it to break its fall. Excitement rising in my chest, I crawl up the side of the edge, eyes wide with anticipation.

I only see a glimpse of a solid black mass before instinctive panic seizes my heart and I duck back down, trying to keep my breathing steady and quiet.

I don't hear a noise. No growling or snarling or barking. And definitely no pit bull howl either, that signaled their inevitable kill.

I slowly peek over the edge. A black dog is lying there on its side. It's partially hidden by a white boulder sticking out of the ground, which has blood smears all over it. The dog must've hit the rock on the way down. It is completely motionless.

I can see a little bit of its head. It's a shape I've never seen before. There's no doubt about it.

This is the legendary pit bull.

With nervous, shaky fingers, I grab my knife and hold it out in front of me for some measure of protection. It suddenly occurs to me how small it is.

Before the pit bull can look up or something, I scramble over to the bloody boulder and press my back up against it, trying to slow my breathing. Every single horrifying legend of the deadly pit bull flashes through my head right now. How it's told that their big, empty brains swell up every once in a while and cause it to go mad. How once it tastes the blood of man, it can never stop until it

tastes it again. How it's so unstable that it turns on any creature in its vicinity, even other dogs. How their jaws have a locking mechanism that make it impossible for them to let go once they've bitten down. Not that it would ever want to let go anyway.

I peek ever so carefully around the boulder. I still hear no sounds except for alarmed birds, not even breathing from the dog. I risk a fleeting glance at it. Motionless.

Could it be dead?

I gather my meager and fickle courage before it can desert me completely, and creep around the rock to face the dog.

Rumors of it being the largest dog are false, anyone could tell. The pit bull is smaller than a golden retriever and even a greyhound. The first thing any viewer would notice about it is its coat. I know the look, color, texture, and pretty much anything else about the dog species we fight, and this dog's coat is different. Unlike the others, which either have thick long hair or sparse short hair, this dog is a mixture, with shiny, short, thick fur all over its body. The hairs that face the sunlight shine with a glossy sheen, though much of it is streaked and matted with blood. It has a long thin tail and medium legs. Its shoulders bulge with muscle in contrast to its relatively narrow hips. This is a dog built for speed.

Its head is different from any other dog I know. It's straight, wide, and blocky, unlike the golden retriever or greyhound or poodle, which have narrow faces. It has large floppy ears and a black nose. Its eyes and mouth are shut tight.

"Oh, wow. . . ."

My words have no effect on the pit bull. It must be dead. I can't believe my eyes. I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, have struck down this fearsome creature and killed it with my own hands. Not even the Vikings of old could claim such a feat!

"I- I- I did it."

Nothing stirs in the forest. Not even the birds sing now. They must sense my triumph. That's the only explanation.

"Oh, I did it, this- this fixes everything! Yes!"

Reveling in my triumph, I place a foot on the dog's foreleg; hand on my knee, gazing into the sky arrogantly, like a proud Viking would when standing over their proud catch. "I have brought down this mighty beas- waah!"

The pit bull comes to life with a croaky growl and shakes my leg off. I stumble back into the boulder, completely vulnerable, my heart racing in my chest so fast it hurts. But the pit bull does not spring up. It just lies there, breathing heavily, eyes clenched shut tight.

I approach it slowly, my knife held out too far for practical use should it choose to attack me. Its ribs rise and fall erratically with every shaky breath it takes. Its legs and neck are bound in my bola, making it nearly impossible for it to move, but its head is

free, and I'm afraid that it's going to whip around and bite my leg off.

But all it does is tilt its head a little, press its ears back, and open its eyes.

To look right at me.

The pit bull has green eyes. Lime green, and filled with streaks and dots of varying shades of emerald. The pupil is dilated to a tiny dot. They seem huge in the dog's face, staring right into _my _eyes. Other than this, it does not move.

Something about the intensity of its stare makes me ashamed to look back. I concentrate on the knife in my hands, the instrument that will bring me glory, but something about those eyes draws my unwilling gaze.

It's startling how big its eyes are. Expressive. Almost humanlike. Tiny sparks of light flicker and dance in them. As I watch, entranced, I become aware of some indiscernible emotion behind them. They are trying to tell me something.

It's only when the pit bull narrows its eyes and whimpers, a high-pitched and desperate sound, that I recognize it.

Fear.

This dog is afraid of me.

Why? Why is the all-powerful and deadly pit bull . . . _afraid_ of me?

I suck in a shallow breath. Then another. "I'm going to kill you, dog," I tell it in a low voice. "I'm going to- I'm going to cut out your heart and take it to my father." I close my eyes, willing myself to picture this, to want this. I concentrate on the sleek black body, the body of a dangerous killer, instead of its- its eyes-

"I am a Viking."

I suddenly hate those eyes. They don't have a right to be looking at me, _into_ me. They don't have a right to be bright green. They're supposed to be as red and black as the horrible creature's soul. They weren't allowed to experience- to express fear.

"_I am a VIKING!_" I shout at it, wanting it to close its eyes, to look away, to gaze at me with contempt and hate like it should. It doesn't even blink. I raise my arms above my head, knife flashing, ready to stab the dog in the chest.

This is a mindless, bloodthirsty monster. The world will be better once it's dead. Everyone will celebrate you when you walk into Berk with this thing's head on a spear. Your father will be so proud of you. Killing this dog will give you everything you ever wanted.

This dog's life in exchange for your own.

So what's taking so long?

My entire life I've been shunned and disregarded as inferior. I've never gone a single day where I haven't thirsted to know what that kind of power tastes like, what kind of pride it could bring me. And now I do. Only I don't feel pride. I feel a burning shame.

My traitorous eyes peek open and glance down one last time. The dog's eyes have widened in terror, pleading with me, begging me to stop. It will feel pain, I realize. It will feel a blade piercing its flesh and be powerless to stop it. It will feel blood spray and nerves scream as it is mutilated. And it won't be able to do anything to stop me.

For a horrible moment, I thought of myself as my father, and the pit bull as me.

The dog wails one last time and shuts its eyes tight, letting its head drop to the ground in defeat. It's giving up. I can almost hear it.

I don't want to die.

I can't do it.

I let the knife drop to my side. I stare at it, panting, knowing that it could have been dripping with red right now.

I can't do it.

I look at the pit bull. It doesn't seem to realize that I can't kill it. I can see now the slices and bloodstains on its hide where it had struck up against all sorts of obstacles after I'd shot it down. I can see now the deep cuts where the bola cord had worn away skin and flesh. I can see now the pool of its own blood that it lies in, its huge clawed paws completely hidden in its own gore.

"I did this," I say, almost choking on my words, and I turn to leave, to run, to let the pit bull die on its own.

But it wouldn't die on its own. It would still be my fault. I had shot it down and bound it to the earth, and it couldn't get away. It would die slowly and in agony, either from starvation, thirst, scavengers and predators, or infection. That was a worse death than me cutting out its heart, and it would still be my fault. Its death would still be on my conscience.

I sigh, looking away, closing my eyes.

In seconds I've made my decision. In three steps I hover over the pit bull. With my knife I hack at the bola cord tying the pit bull up. I don't think it might kill me. I don't think about freeing the deadliest and most bloodthirsty dog that man has ever had the misfortune to meet. I only think about righting a wrong that I've committed. This is my fault, and I'm fixing it. When the dog's free, I'll just run as fast as I can.

The pit bull has other ideas.

I don't even realize it's unbound until it suddenly jumps to its feet. I flinch away, throwing myself backwards, as a giant black paw slams into my chest and pins me to the ground. My head bangs hard

against the boulder, but all I feel is the razor claws digging into my neck. I gasp in terror and shock, taking in the sleek midnight leg on my chest that feels like it weighs a hundred pounds, before I look up and realize the dog's head is right in my face.

I freeze.

Furious green eyes pin me in place more effectively than any claw ever could. The pit bull snarls, teeth showing, as it stares at me. In those eyes, I see the wild. I see the distant pines and the roar of the ocean and the howl of the wind in the mountaintops. These eyes have seen wonders, and horrors, and so much more than I could possibly hope to. These were the eyes of a proud, unforgiving creature that should never have been brought down. I try to crawl away, but the claws dig into my neck and I don't move. I can barely breathe.

Nonononono, I think frantically. _Please please please. Don't let it end like this. Someone, anyone, help me._

I don't want to die.

Then the dog's ear twitches, and it straightens up, its lips curling back in a savage nightmare grin. A whining howl bubbles in its throat, and I know I'm going to die. It's the sound of the pit bull's impending kill. No one has ever survived hearing it directed at them. I cringe back, my eyes slits, knowing those dripping teeth are the last things I will ever see.

The pit bull rears back on its hind legs, the howl deafening now, before it slams its paws on either side of my head and _barks_ in my face, so deep and long it feels like a roar. My ears feel like they're exploding. Then with a scratch of its claws and a growl, the dog whirls around and dashes into the forest, howling and barking its anger to the trees and birds around it. It crashes into a rock wall, then a tree, stumbling and tripping over itself.

I lay motionless, clutching my chest, breathing like I just ran up a mountain. I get to my feet shakily, the forgotten knife in my limp hand, watching the dark shape of the legendary pit bull disappear into the fog, screeching all the way.

I turn slowly and start walking home.

I have seen the pit bull. I have confronted it with no weapons and lived from its mercy.

With a shaky mumble, I collapse, unable to hold my disbelief up.

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LIKE A FAUST.

Fuck Microsoft Word. Just fuck it so hard. It keeps putting those annoying-as-hell squiggly lines under my words. **_Even when my words make sense.**_** I'm going back to Pages, I swear. At least Pages isn't as nitpicky. **

"Every single horrifying legend of the deadly pit bull flashes

through my head right now. How it's told that their big, empty brains swell up every once in a while and cause it to go mad. How once it tastes the blood of man, it can never stop until it tastes it again. How it's so unstable that it turns on any creature in its vicinity, even other dogs. How their jaws have a locking mechanism that makes it impossible for them to let go once they've bitten down. Not that it would ever want to let go anyway."

^ This is all pure myth. Go Google it or something. All common pit bull myths. I figured I could use them to add to the mysterious deadliness of the HTTYD pit bulls. Educate thineselves, children!

For some referencing, Toothless is not those really low-to-the-ground types of pit bulls. He's a bit lankier, maybe a pit bull-boxer mix, but with a pure pit bull face. All black, with green eyes.

ALSO: The reason the fiercest dragon (Monstrous Nightmare) is a golden retriever is because, no offense, I am so fucking tired of those dogs being the goody-two-shoes they're portrayed as in the media. Honestly? They're awesome dogs, but seriously, **_every dog movie I see**_** has either a collie, a Lab, or a golden as the protagonists, and a boxer/mastiff/Rottweiler/Doberman/pit bull as the antagonist. So in this story, the roles are reversed, and they are the 'dangerous' dogs. I'm sorry if this offends anyone. I'm not taking jabs at the breed.**

If you would like, please do review. I wub dem. They're awesome.

OK WANNA KNOW SOMETHING FUNNY. My pit bull comes up to me today (I'm lying on the ground) and just stretches right on top of me. Like, I'm not even kidding. She literally gets on top of my stomach and stretches for like twenty seconds. I had to shove her off because she was restricting my breathing. Then she licked me **_in the mouth.**_** Bleh. For God's sake, Pia, quit being so nice to me. I wuv my dog.**

End
file.